

Josh.Rupprecht@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jennifer.Rojas@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jamaal.LaFrance@chargers.nfl.com  
Brock.Anderson@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Lauren.Meyer@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Danny.Markino@chargers.nfl.com

## Chargers Media Availability

**Monday, September 13, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.**

### HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

#### **On T Storm Norton filling in at RT after T Bryan Bulaga sustained an injury:**

"I think that he performed really well. At halftime, we were able to get him situated, and I felt like he was able to do a good job in observation mode in that first half of understanding their plan of attack, where their rushers were and, from a scheme standpoint, what they had activated. Then, getting with [Run Game Coordinator/Offensive Line Coach] Frank [Smith] and [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi] and being able to say, 'Hey, this is the direction we're going in the second half, from our offensive standpoint and where we wanted to go with our gameplan. I thought that he stepped right in. I thought that he got better as the game went on. I felt like he was a real asset to us. I don't think that there was any better illustration than that than on that final drive when we converted those four third downs. I'm really proud of his performance. That's kind of how he played most of training camp. I feel like that certainly was a good test against that front. Hopefully, that gives him a lot of confidence moving forward."

#### **On if he ever dreamed of receiving a game ball from his players after a win:**

"No, I don't think that my dreams are really about me. It was really more just about our players. An amazing moment. I think that it's particularly special when your players give you one. That means that the most to me, when our starting quarterback was able to give me one. That means a lot, coming from him. A dream come true that way. Being a coach, it's never about yourself, it's about your guys. I was proud to give our those three game balls because those guys were certainly deserving."

#### **On how he would 'like to see a defensive back play the ball' when it's in the air:**

"I would prefer for our defensive player to catch it or knock it down. [S Nasir Adderley] tracked it fine, in terms of getting over there. But, he had plenty of time to finish that play. You need to finish that play, as a defensive player. So, I would prefer for him to finish the play and not for [Washington WR] Terry McLaurin to catch it. We had a good down going there. Feel like at the worst, we would have been able to have an illegal contact, which would have been a lot different field position than the resulting catch. That was the only explosive pass that we gave up in the game. We need to perform better when the ball is in the air there."

#### **On the flight home last night and how he manages his time in the air:**

"I get really good reports from our flight attendants. We have a really good crew that gives me a really good pulse of where our team is at. Miss Jana, one of our flight attendants, she's from Alabama and she's been with the team for a long time. Then, we have a flight attendant who actually played for [Chargers Hall of Fame Head Coach] Don Coryell back at San Diego State. Those guys give me really good reports on our team. The fact that they're acting like gentlemen on the plane and that they're watching tape and that they're around each other, that makes me feel really good about the character of our guys. That's exciting because that means a lot to me, how we conduct ourselves on trips. The other thing that it allows you to do, on a long plane ride like that, is kind of unpack the game because you have a lot of time to do it. I was able to watch all three phases of the game and get ahead on Dallas, as well. We were kind of making our after-action reports in all three phases of the game — what we did well, what we didn't do well, substitutions, penalties, preparation, all of those mechanics. We can kind of do that on the flight so that we don't have to do it this morning. You're unpacking that, then you're able to get ahead on Dallas a little bit because it's a five-hour plane flight. You're

able to do a lot of that. You're able to get around and talk to people, too — kind of unwind, decompress, everything that way, too. Get to see some of the guys up front. It was a productive ride home. Five hours, you can accomplish a lot."

#### **On the offensive line's performance on Sunday:**

"They were outstanding in the game. I felt like our production in the run game and in the passing game reflected that. Certainly, on third down, it was kind of a historic day, from what I understand, on third down. Felt like we really had a tremendous protection plan going into the game. Credit to [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi], [Run Game Coordinator/Offensive Line Coach] Frank [Smith], [Assistant Offensive Line Coach] Shaun Sarrett, [Tight Ends Coach] Kevin Koger, [Running Backs Coach] Derrick Foster, all of those guys for putting together a really good run game plan and a protection plan. [Passing Game Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach] Shane Day, I thought, was outstanding coaching [QB] Justin [Herbert] because I felt like he played within the timing and the rhythm of the offense. Felt like he was outstanding from a timing standpoint. I felt like our guys had command of this plan, and they played like it. I felt like we were able to play with the type of variety that we needed to — run/pass, the types of passes, the types of runs, to kind of get their rushers off rhythm. That's a really, really good defense that we just played. Watching the film, it really reflects that. [Washington DT] Jonathan Allen is as good of an interior player as you're going to play against in the NFL. To have [Washington DE] Montez [Sweat] and [Washington DE] Chase [Young] on the edge, then you have [Washington DT] Daron Payne, [Washington DT Matt] Ioannidis, [Washington DT] Tim Settle, that group of six is about as complete of a front as you're going to play against. They're extremely well-coached. That team is going to win a lot of games. I was really pleased with how our O-line communicated. I thought that we played with real physicality. It's obviously a good start. At the same time, there's a lot that we can correct. That's what we're working on today."

#### **On the potential of the offensive line:**

"It's just one performance, so I think that you treat that performance like it has a life of its own. That performance isn't going to have a lot of bearing on how we play against Dallas. I think that we need to take a look and just examine that performance, unpack it, and be really critical of what happened. Even some of the plays that turned out well for us, we didn't execute well at times. I think that you're always trying to tell yourself the truth and not be lulled into an illusion. Results sometimes do that to you. This group, though, showed real toughness. The guy that everybody was wondering about coming into the game was our rookie left tackle, and he was outstanding in the game. When you don't talk about him a lot, that means that he probably performed at a high level. That's what the film told us. He was outstanding. I'm really proud of him. Not surprised, but really proud of him. I felt like [T] Rashawn [Slater] was really good in this football game. I thought that from an operation standpoint, all of you guys that were there, I felt like our mechanics we're really good; no delays, no substitution errors. I think that's a sign of a good operation. I was proud of our line for being a big part in that."

#### **On the offensive line's impact on the final offensive drive:**

"If you look at all four of those third downs [conversions], those were a lot of clean pockets. I felt like that group on defense had to defend a lot of plays. I felt like they were tired. I felt like our energy was good at the end of that game and I felt like that allowed [QB] Justin [Herbert] to see the field and deliver on time. I think that on all four of those throws, he was not under duress on any of those. He was able to locate that football exactly where he wanted it, and then, our receivers made some really good catches."

#### **On T Rashawn Slater:**

"He has outstanding movement for the position. He can really unlock and create a lot of power from the ground. He's got strong hands. Also, if he's in a disadvantaged position, he can fix it sometimes where a lot of people can't. He has that lower body movement, power, and strong hands. When you factor that in with his brain and how smart he is, he can just truly play the game under control and with a lot of power and velocity. He had a good understanding of the game-plan. I was proud of the way he started the game. I feel like if you get off to a good start — just like any player, offensive tackle isn't any different — you can get yourself into a rhythm early. That's going to create confidence rest of the way. I felt like he did a really good job in the first series of creating a rhythm and confidence for himself."

**On the final drive:**

“I’m not surprised on how we performed on that drive. What I really liked about that drive was that we finished with the ball. We finished with the ball, and we didn’t have to go out there and defend a two-minute drive. Going into it, talking to [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi] and our offensive staff, it was like, ‘Hey, we want to be aggressive on this drive.’ When we started the drive, we had that second down where he [QB Justin Herbert] ripped that bender to [WR] Keenan [Allen]. That was a big part of the drive. We’d waited to put that play into that drive. We had it up a couple times and didn’t get to call it. That, to me, got our offensive in rhythm. We were going to stay aggressive, because we felt like they might think we were in four-minute mode. They might’ve thought we were trying to run it. Trying to burn some clock, this and that. That wasn’t going to be our approach, we still wanted to throw the football. Then, we had the unfortunate penalty. When you’re behind, what’s going to happen? We were able to get a clean pocket on that third-and-16 — an accurate throw and catch. That got us on track. The rest of the way was a good example of us having enough left in our ammunition in terms of the inventory of plays we’re able to activate to get matchups. [QB] Justin [Herbert] was able to stay calm, poised, and really deliver the football on time. Our receivers made some really good catches, too.”

**On overcoming ‘flinches’:**

“There were a couple in the game. That was one of them, that back-to-back sequence with the fumble. Then, you follow up with an interception. I feel like that was a good example of our defense taking the field and being able to stop that sudden change and create a takeaway for us when we needed to have it. Defensively, we did that a couple times when they had some field position. We were able to operate off of sudden change. I was proud of that. Offensively, I felt like the whole game our guys felt close to really bursting from our opponent. It didn’t quite happen that way, but in the fourth quarter, we really hung tough. We were moving the football. On the sideline, there was a lot of calm in that. It wasn’t like, ‘Hey, we aren’t getting anything going.’ There was a lot being engineered. We just needed to finish. I felt like that was conclusion, how we played at the end where we scored the touchdown off the takeaway to [WR] Mike [Williams] on the fade-stop. Then we were able to finish with the ball at the end of the game. We popped some good runs. Had the third-down conversions. We were able to finish the game with the ball. There’s no better feeling than a victory on the road. I felt like our offense did a really good job of hanging in there, playing off our defense, and our defense feeding off our offense. When our offense hit that fade-stop to [WR] Mike [Williams], that got us ignited on defense. We were able to go out there and close out with a good stop. You talk about no-flinch, but we had that penalty — [OLB] Joey’s [Bosa] roughing the passer penalty on third-and-four after [WR] Mike’s [Williams] touchdown. We really had all the momentum and then you come down like, ‘Oh man, hey that could’ve been deflating. We got a roughing the passer, what’s going to happen after that?’ We were able to respond right away with a stop, and get the ball back to our guys. I felt like it was a team win. There was a lot of that in the game, in terms of not flinching.”

**On T Bryan Bulaga:**

“Bryan’s back is still day-to-day. He came in this morning sore. Day-to-day. We’ll know more on Wednesday, for sure. It is his lower back. We’ll be able to unpack more of that on Wednesday.”

**On the special teams performance:**

“[K] Tristan [Vizcaino] was really good in the game. His operation between [LS] Matt [Overton] and [P] Ty [Long] was good. His kicks had good ball flight. I was pleased with that. He made all his kicks. Our operation was good, our protection was good. I felt like [P] Ty [Long] punted the football well. He had his first one that he’d probably like to have back. But other than that, I felt like our punt team protected and covered well. There was one kickoff return I didn’t like, where we lost leverage to the right side. Otherwise, our kickoff team did well. We have a lot of young players on that team who I’m really excited about. But there was that one going to our right that we can do better on. It was a longer return than we’d like. And then we drew a penalty on a return, which I didn’t like. [DB] Mark Webb [Jr.] blocked in the back. That’s not good when you’re on a return phase. I didn’t like that penalty. But, then [LB] Drue Tranquill forced a penalty on a punt return, doing a great job up the middle on a punt rush. It kind of evened out there. Then, we forced that missed field goal in the end, which I think was the by-product of a decent rush. Overall, there’s a lot to learn from, but the story, as much as anything, was the way [K] Tristan [Vizcaino] kicked. The thing we need to clean up is catching these punts. We let two punts drop. One punt dropped on the right side that went about 18 yards. Then, we ended up catching a punt off a bounce, which we can definitely secure quicker and need to.”

**On Slater working through isolation:**

“When he was in true isolation, without scheme to help him, the guy was really strong. He was fundamentally sound; he was physically tough. I felt like he understood who was working next to him, which is important. ‘Hey, what’s my set like compared to what’s inside of me? What’s happening?’ You could tell his set angles in the all-22 were based off what was inside and around him. I like that. I feel like he had a good awareness. Then, just taking the fight to the opponent. This is who I’m playing against; Is it [Washington DE] Chase [Young], is it [Washington DE] Montez [Sweat], is it one of those bigger guys outside? That was good. I felt like our protection plan was outstanding. We mixed it up. It’s tough for any tackle, I don’t care what their caliber is. If you go on an island for an entire game, you’re going to lose some against these guys because they’re that good. I felt like we mixed it up in protection. [QB] Justin’s [Herbert] timing was outstanding. All in all, it was a really strong performance by Rashawn.”

**On Washington RB Antonio Gibson’s 27-yard run in the first quarter and the run defense’s performance:**

“That’s the one I didn’t like. There is no way that should have happened on that particular play. There were kind of two other variables that created a vertical seam with the blitz — who needs to be thicker. The, [CB] Chris [Harris Jr.] needs to get down there a little bit sooner. Then, [CB] Michael [Davis] has to be better in the crack replace game. There are three things kind of working there if you look at the play. Outside of that, I felt like our guys were tough in run defense. We wanted to make sure we put a roof over the coverage. I felt like our guys hung tough, especially after JJ [DL Justin Jones] went out. Outside of that run, I would say it was a good day.”

**On S Nasir Adderley’s responsibility on Washington TE Logan Thomas’ touchdown reception:**

“He was in man-to-man on that guy. He needs to play it opposite leverage. He ended up trying to play it in front of the guy, which down there in the goal line, you don’t want to play that because they can’t make it up and down over the top of you, you really want to get underneath that route — especially against a 6-foot-5 guy. If you are on the front shoulder of it, now he’s got you boxed out. Right now, it’s 6-foot-5 on 5-foot-11, so he really wants to be in front of that guy because you can’t make that throw up and down. That was a coaching point that I got to do a better job of educating the guy on. He was in good shape, it’s not like he was beat across his face, he just needs to play it with different leverage. That will be a good one for him to learn from because those are the kind of guys that they throw to down there, big guys. We got to do a good job of covering that better.”

**On OLB Joey Bosa hustling to make the tackle on Washington’s failed third-down conversion, leading to the Chargers gaining possession to close out the game:**

“Yeah, great observation. We had Nas [S Nasir Adderley] coming off in coverage, but it’s certainly, to your point, there wasn’t just one guy on that tackle. There ended up being two guys on that tackle, which is very impactful. I thought Joey was very fantastic in the game. I thought he rushed at a really high level. He obviously had the sack fumble. If you just look at his pure pass rush production, it was really high. From the first third down in the game, he was coming. We have to do a good job of rushing around him, which I think is going to create an even more production for him, if we can choreograph it even better. He was outstanding in the game. I felt like that hustle play at the end just shows you why he’s so valuable. You know he is not to just a great pass rusher, he is a complete player. That was a great hustle play. Really just excited about his first performance.”

**On the performance of DL Linval Joseph, Justin Jones and Jerry Tillery:**

“I like the way all three of those guys played in this football game. I thought that they were fresh early on. I thought Justin Jones was outstanding. If you take at his snaps, he was outstanding in the football game. He had that big tackle for a loss. On that first drive, if you take a look at that explosive run, the very next play that was a tackle for a loss, just sometimes when you give up an explosion, they have the momentum in the game. On that very next play, we were able to get a tackle for a loss, which set up for a third-down stop. I thought Justin was outstanding, I thought that like he rushed very well. [Washington G] Brandon Scherff is an outstanding player, so you get a good measuring stick of who you are as a player. I felt the same with Jerry. I thought that Jerry was really active. I thought that he was around the football. When you play for [Defensive Line Coach] Giff Smith, you hustle to the football. All of those guys were hustling to the football. Linval Joseph, you just can’t say enough about him being steady in the inside of your defense. He really gives us a chance in the run front. He’s been a really fun guy to coach. Then, we are able to get [DL] Eric Banks in

the mix, as well, who's improving. Then, [DL] Christian Covington, he has just been so steady for us. I felt like all five of those guys played pretty well. They will learn a lot from the film for this coming week."

**On the offense controlling the game's time of possession:**

"When people talk about you know team football, I think that is an element of team football. I think that when you are well-rested, you have more energy. In the converse, if you look at their team and what they had to defend for how long they had to defend, that has an impact, that has a cumulative effect as the game goes on. The other thing that it allows you to do when you are on the bench, is it allows you to adjust your stuff better, make your key adjustments, and then just kind of preview the plays that are coming your way. I feel like that's another benefit of your offense being out there. And, it impacts your kicking game, your guys are fresher for the kicking game, as well. Proud of the way we possessed the ball in that game. Defensively, I felt like we made really good adjustments in the game and finished the game playing good ball."

**On an injury update for S Nasir Adderley:**

"It's actually a hip flexor. He came back in the game. He was sore this morning. He is feeling good — sore, but feeling good. He should practice this week."

**SAFTEY DERWIN JAMES JR.**

**On the defense's performance:**

"Watching the tape, I feel like we did well. We need to clean up some of those penalties we had. Besides that, we played well on defense."

**On his near-interception:**

"I knew when [Washington WR] Dyami [Brown] is on the ball, he's going to run over most of the time. I was trying to get there before he did. I saw that the rush was coming, [OLB Joey] Bosa was coming. I knew [Washington QB Ryan Fitzpatrick] Fitz was going to try and get to get it. I needed to jump in front a little more, but it was good breaking it up."

**On adjusting the gameplan upon Washington QB Ryan Fitzpatrick's injury:**

"It was an adjustment. We still wanted to stick to the same calls we wanted to run, but we had to keep reminding the D-line to stay in their rush lanes. A lot of his [Washington QB Taylor Heinicke's] stuff is getting his legs involved. We all know getting the legs involved is an extra element we have to go against."

**On his 'comfortability' in the game:**

"Of course, it'll take those games to get my wind all the way back up. I didn't play in preseason, and I haven't been out there as much, but I felt good. Being in my first game back felt like how I feel in practice. I put myself through the same stuff in practice. When I went out there, I felt the exact same. I was able to finish in the fourth quarter."

**On preparing for Cowboys QB Dak Prescott and RB Ezekiel Elliott:**

"Any time you have a premiere guy like Zeke back there, you always have to respect it. They might be throwing the ball right now, but they still have a premium guy that they can get the ball to. They can come out and run the ball 20 times and be okay with that. We have to come in and be ready for whatever, come in balanced. If they pass, we're ready. If they run, we're ready."

**On the cut-block penalty that was committed against him:**

"In my mind, I'm not thinking about the penalty, I'm thinking make the play. Just because I get cut, that doesn't stop me from making the play. I've always had my mindset on finishing the ball, finishing the play. It was good getting the penalty when I realized, 'Oh, he cut me.' It was quick."

**On watching the offense seal the game:**

"We were ready as a defense, but we had all the confidence in the world in our offense. We know once our offense got the ball, they were going to go down the field. We see it every day in practice. We go against those guys every day. Once we saw the type of time [QB Justin] Herbert had back there, and the way [WR] Keenan [Allen] and all those guys were running their routes, we already knew what time it was."

## **WIDE RECEIVER MIKE WILLIAMS**

### **On his 'level of comfort' entering Sunday's game against Washington:**

"Yes, for sure. When I hurt my hip flexor, it was more so not making it any worse than what it was. That was the main thing. I felt like I was going to be able to play in the opener; that was the goal. We made that happen. I felt comfortable coming into practice last week, getting the gameplan down pat, and getting ready to make plays."

### **On his 'level of comfort' with his role in the offensive scheme:**

"I was really comfortable. Me and [Offensive Coordinator Joe Lombardi] talked after the game, he was like, 'In this offense, the ball is going to find the X [receiver].' I was like, 'I appreciate you. It can't happen at a better time.' I'm excited about it and I'm looking forward to every opportunity. I'm ready for it. I'm looking forward to coming out this week, prepare and get ready for this game on Sunday."

### **On the differences between the current offensive system and ones he's played in prior:**

"I don't know. I feel like it's more so getting others involved in the offense a lot more. Not too much putting it around one person; we're using all of the talents that we have available. I feel like that's what makes this offense move. It's not mostly about who the players are. It's about getting everybody the ball while spreading it out and making the defenders defend everything."

### **On how 'encouraging' it was to receive 12 targets on Sunday:**

"It was fun. For me, as a receiver, you want to get the ball, you want to make plays for your team. For me to get the opportunities, it was fun. It felt good to have the ball in my hands, making plays. We have to continue to keep it rolling. That was the first game, the opener — we're 1-0, but we have to continue to do it throughout the season. Just make every opportunity, or every play, that comes our way, so we're looking forward to doing that the rest of the season."

### **On if he's approaching his missed catch in the endzone with optimism:**

"For sure. I look at it, at the end of the day, how you just said. It was a missed opportunity. Throughout the game, I made up for it, made a couple of plays after that. Coming out this week, we have to make those plays. That's what we have to do: Make those plays and not leave those plays out there because you don't know the outcome. That one play might change the game, so just continue to make these plays and let the offense lean on me when they need me."

### **On the impact of TE Jared Cook:**

"He was with [Offensive Coordinator Joe Lombardi] in New Orleans, so I'll ask him questions like, 'On this play, what are you looking for? What is my area on the field?' He's been in the league for like 12, 13 years, so he has a lot of experience. I talk to him not just necessarily about football, about other stuff, also. As far as the offense, he's been in this offense, so I ask him about spots, leverages and stuff on the field — things that can help me improve while I'm out there running routes."

### **On mentality of the offensive unit going into the final possession with over six minutes remaining in regulation, whether to 'kill the clock and end the game' or be aggressive and try to score:**

"It was kind of both. As we got down closer, the time was down. It was like, 'Let's get a first down, then the game is over.' As the drive started, it was, 'Let's score a touchdown and end the game.' It was kind of both, but as we got the drive going, time started moving off the clock. Before you knew it, they already used all of their timeouts, so we wanted to end the game with us having the ball."